

ASBURY TRAIL AWARD

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA



BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY (1745-1816)
ESQUESTRIAN MONUMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

WHAT a wonderful experience he must have had, this prophet of the wilderness! Who shall say where his influence, written upon the immortal souls of men, shall end?

President Calvin Coolidge, in address at the unveiling of the Asbury Monument.

Methodist

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THE ASBURY TRAIL AWARD

The Asbury Trail Award is offered to Explorers and their Dads under the joint sponsorship of the Boy Scouts of America and the Western North Carolina Historical Association. The Award consists of a Medal and a Certificate and will be conferred on those who fulfill the following conditions:

1. Hiking the old Cataloochee trail over which Bishop Francis Asbury crossed the mountains in 1810.
2. Reading one of the recommended books on the life of Asbury.
3. Submitting an essay of not less than one thousand words on Asbury and his contribution to America.

The official hike covers approximately twenty-three miles between Clyde, North Carolina, and Davenport Gap, Tennessee, as indicated on the map in this folder. Other nearby points historically related to Asbury are also indicated on the map, but visits to them are optional.

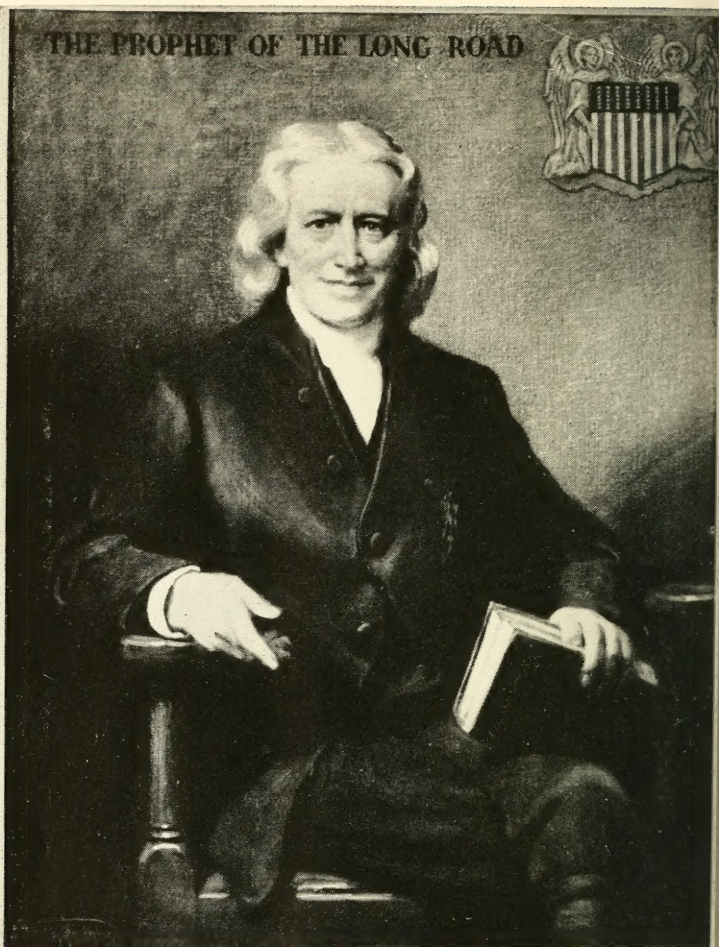
Francis Asbury was the first Bishop elected and consecrated in America by any denomination. He was the virtual creator of the largest Protestant body in the United States.

The Asbury Trail Award, however, is not denominational. As the religious pioneer on the early frontier, Asbury's contribution to the country is recognized by all historians, and a bronze equestrian statue has been erected in Washington and was dedicated by the President of the United States. The Award may be earned by any Scout without regard to his affiliation.

For further information and enrollment address:

DANIEL BOONE COUNCIL
Boy Scouts of America
Box 7215
Asheville, North Carolina

THE PROPHET OF THE LONG ROAD



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FRANCIS ASBURY, THE PROPHET OF THE LONG ROAD
By Frank O. Salisbury, C.V.O., R.P.S., LL.D., D.F.A.

The original of this finest portrait of Asbury is in the historical library at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. It has been exhibited at the Royal Society in London.

THE TRAIL

The old Cataloochee Trail runs from Cove Creek, North Carolina, to the area around Cosby Tennessee.

In general it parallels Highway 284, and coincides with that road at several points. It skirts the border of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park for 22 miles or more, and is inside and outside of the Park at various points.

The best description of the Trail is a report submitted to the National Park Service in 1940 by Mr. H. C. Wilburn, entitled *The Cataloochee Aboriginal Trail and Its Use and Development by White People*. This report may be seen at the Park Headquarters in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and in Washington, D. C.

It is still possible to identify parts of the Trail which do not coincide with the highway. There are indentations, "dug out" stretches, Indian "flats" or sites of settlements or resting places, a stone cairn or "Indian grave" and similar evidences, which are described and located in Mr. Wilburn's report.

The origin of the important Trail along which the Cherokees crossed the mountains is lost in antiquity. It was mentioned in literature as early as 1799, when it was called a "turnpike." The Indians had by that time abandoned their settlements along the Trail, although the area was in their hunting grounds and protected by law.

Francis Asbury crossed the Appalachian mountains around sixty times, using different routes. He frequently went from the Knoxville area by way of the present Marshall and Hot Springs to Asheville, or Buncombe Court House, North Carolina. Sometimes he went from the present Morganton, North Carolina, through the gap east of Roan Mountain near Elk Park to the present Elizabethtown and Bristol in Tennessee.

In 1810, however, he took "the new route" and followed the old Cataloochee Trail.

Asbury was accompanied on this trip by Bishop William McKendree, the Rev. Henry Boehm of Pennsylvania, a German-speaking preacher who often travelled with Asbury and whose father, Martin Boehm, was a Mennonite bishop and one of the founders of the United Brethren Church, and the Rev. John McGee, one of the founders of the Camp Meeting movement.

Asbury travelled through Kentucky to the McKendree home near Nashville and to the Holston country of East Tennessee. His party reached the home of Mitchell Porter, three miles south of Sevierville on the present Highway 71, between Sevierville and Gatlinburg. Porter's Chapel was there, at the present Zion's Cemetery. Then the party started up the mountain. The story is told in Asbury's famous *Journal*.

ASBURY'S JOURNAL

Thursday, November 29, 1810. We were in doubt whether we should take the old or the new route:¹ we took Mahon's road,² and got along pretty well, thirty miles, to the gate;³ the woman was sick, but the girls of the house were attentive and polite at Mr. Mahon's.

Friday, our troubles began at the foaming, roaring stream, which hid the rocks. At Catahouche⁴ I walked over a log. But O, the mountain—height after height, and five miles over! After crossing other streams,⁵ and losing ourselves in the woods, we came in, about nine o'clock at night to Vater Shuck's.⁶ What an awful day!

¹ The "new route" was the aboriginal Cataloochee Trail.

² Mahon's road was from near Pigeon Forge on Highway 71 to the head of Cosby Creek in Cocke County, Tennessee, where it intercepted present Highway 32 from Newport to the present Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

³ The Mahon home was at a toll gate near Cosby, Tenn.

⁴ This stream was Cataloochee Creek, which had various spellings. On the bank of the creek they fed the horses and asked a blessing on a meal of bread. John McGee drove the horses through the stream while Asbury, McKendree, and Boehm crossed on the log. (Boehm: *Reminiscences*, 328).

⁵ At the eastern foot of the mountain they came to Cove Creek, passed through a gate, and reached the settlements on Richland Creek and Pigeon River. They probably went up Jonathan Creek through Dellwood Gap and along Richland Creek where it now forms Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, since the better known trail led that way. Or they could have followed Pigeon River to the mouth of Richland Creek a few miles away. (Boehm, *op.cit.*, 328; Allen: *History of Haywood County*, 217ff.)

⁶ "Vater Shuck" was "Father" Jacob Shook (or Shuck), son of a Dutch immigrant and a Revolutionary soldier, who settled on Pigeon River at the present Clyde, North Carolina, in 1786, and is said to have built the first frame house in Haywood County. It is still standing, the home of Mrs. Mary Morgan, and the attic room which was used for preaching has been preserved with its pulpit and chair. Here was the first society in the county, probably formed by the Rev. Samuel Edney, the pioneer circuit rider of Western North Carolina. Shook bequeathed a tract of land for a camp meeting and the church was long known as Camp Ground. It is now Louisa Chapel. It stands on the original property and bears the date 1798. (Allen, *op.cit.*, 217-227, 593-596.)

Saturday, December 1. Last night I was strongly afflicted with pain. We rode, twenty-five miles, to Buncombe.⁷

Sabbath, December 2. Bishop M'Kendree and John M'Gee rose at five o'clock and left us to fill an appointment about twenty-five miles off.⁸ Myself and Henry Boehm went to Newton's academy,⁹ where I preached. Brother Boehm spoke after me; and Mr. Newton, in exhortation, confirmed what was said. Had I known and studied my congregation for a year, I could not have spoken more appropriately to their particular cases; this I learn from those who know them well. We dined with Mr. Newton: he is almost a Methodist, and reminds me of dear Whatcoat¹⁰—the same placidness and solemnity. We visited James Patton;¹¹ this is, perhaps, the last visit to Buncombe.¹²

⁷ At Buncombe Court House or Asheville the party probably stayed at the home of Daniel Killian, Asbury's favorite stopping place. The place still stands in the northern edge of Asheville and is inhabited by one of Killian's descendants. A marker has been erected there. Nearby is the Asbury Church, which grew out of the society in Killian's house and in which some Asbury relics are preserved.

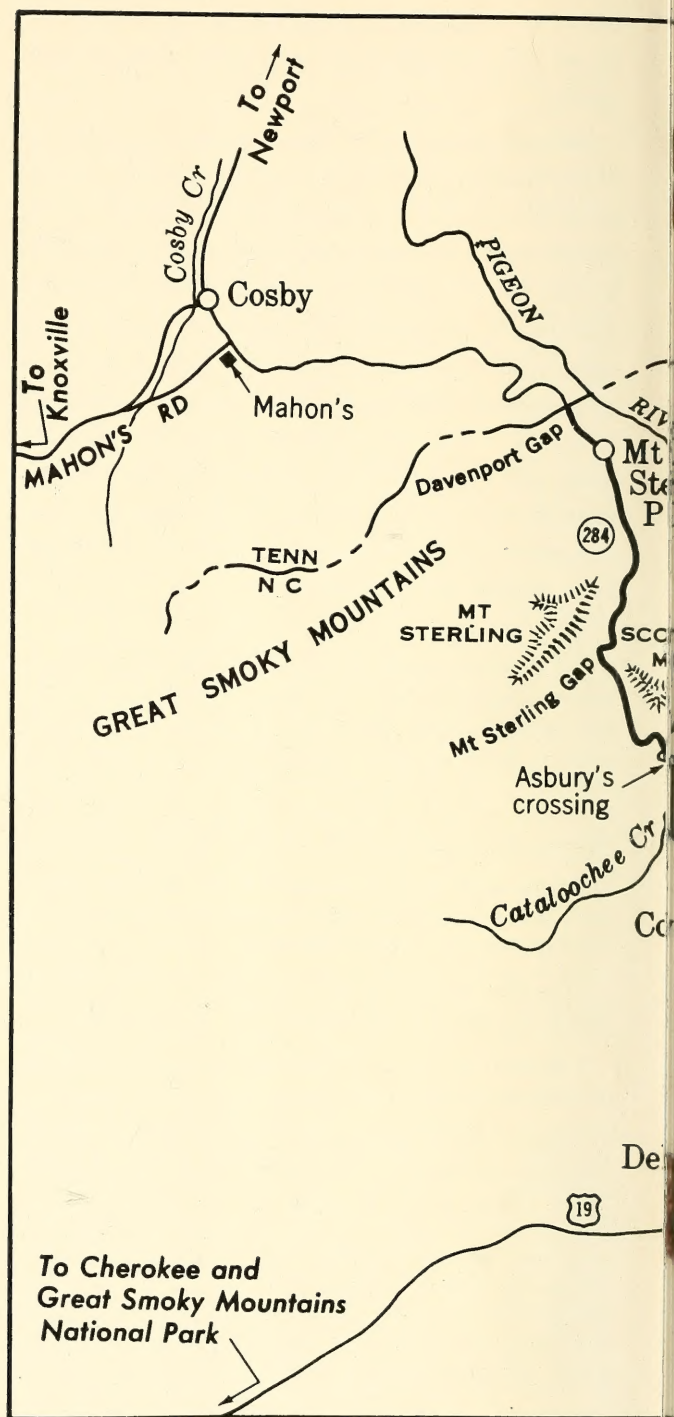
⁸ These men doubtless preached in the home of the Rev. Samuel Edney at the present Edneyville, near Hendersonville. The Edney society is still active.

⁹ The Rev. George Newton, a Presbyterian and Asbury's friend, conducted a well-known school at Asheville.

¹⁰ Richard Whatcoat (1736-1806) came from England in 1784 and became a Bishop in 1800.

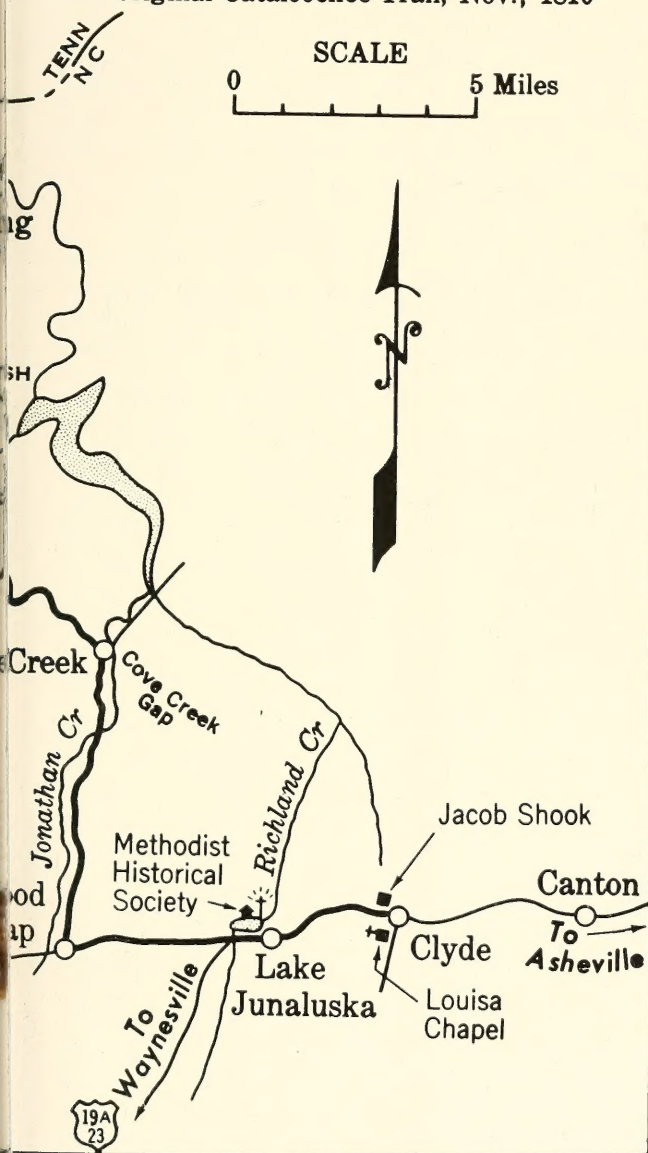
¹¹ James Patton and his sons, James W. and John E., were large property owners in Asheville and ran the Eagle Hotel. Patton Avenue is named for them. Among others who entertained Asbury at various times in the Asheville area were Senator Thomas Foster, George Swain, whose son was three times Governor and President of the University of North Carolina, Colonel James Lowry, half-brother of Governor Swain, William Mills, father-in-law of Samuel Edney, and many others both prominent and otherwise.

¹² This was not Asbury's last visit to Buncombe County. He visited the area each autumn until his death in the spring of 1816.



THE ASBURY TRAIL

The route of Bishop Francis Asbury and Bishop William McKendree over the aboriginal Cataloochee Trail, Nov., 1810



FRANCIS ASBURY

1745-1816

In Washington, D. C., there stands a great equestrian statute of Francis Asbury. It was unveiled by the President of the United States, who presented it to the nation in an address which extolled the preacher on horseback as one of the greatest figures in the pioneer period of American history. More recently the Historical Publications Commission of the United States Government placed the name of Asbury on the list of sixty great Americans whose works should be collected and published, along with such notables as Washington, Jefferson, Adams and Lincoln.

Who was this minister of the Gospel who holds such a secure place in our history?

Boyhood

Francis Asbury was born on August 20, 1745, about four miles from Birmingham, in England. His boyhood home, but not his birthplace, still stands on Newton Road in West Bromwich and is by the city preserved as an historic site.

He was the only son of Joseph (1715-1798) and Elizabeth Rogers (1715-1801) Asbury. He received but little formal education and at the age of thirteen became an apprentice at a nearby forge. Soon thereafter he became a convert of the Evangelical Revival then sweeping England under the leadership of John and Charles Wesley. He became a local preacher, and in 1768 he was admitted to the Conference.

America

The Revival had been brought to America by immigrants from Ireland. It arose almost simultaneously in Maryland and New York and a meeting house had been erected in each place, and an unfinished building had been bought in Philadelphia.

Help was needed and the people appealed to John Wesley for regular preachers. He responded by sending Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor late in 1769.

In 1771 Mr. Wesley called again for volunteers for America, and Francis Asbury and Richard Wright were chosen. They sailed in September and landed at Philadelphia on October 27, 1771.

On shipboard Francis Asbury began his famous *Journal*, later to be carefully edited and published in three volumes in 1821. Among other things he wrote these well-known words:

"Whither am I going? to the New World. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No, I am going to live to God and to bring others so to do."

Asbury in America

On Monday, October 28, 1771, Asbury preached his first sermon in America at St. George's Church in Philadelphia, the oldest church house of the denomination in the United States and the oldest in the world in continuous use by the denomination. Immediately thereafter he went to New York, where he encountered a problem in the administration of the infant societies.

It related to the famous system of itinerancy, or a "circulation of preachers," under which the ministers are changed at intervals. Asbury had been trained under Wesley's rule of frequent changes, but Boardman and Pilmoor preferred longer tenures. On November 27, 1771, Asbury wrote in his *Journal*:

"At present I am dissatisfied. I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I will show them the way."

Show them the way he did. He became the first and greatest of the Circuit Riders, who carried religion, morals, education and general culture along the advancing frontier of this continent. He established the itinerant system which enabled the preachers to keep up with the migrating multitudes and to outstrip all others in growth.

At the Conference in 1774, after Boardman and Pilmoor had returned to England, it was officially determined that the preachers should exchange each six months and that those in New York and Philadelphia should move quarterly.

The first Conference met in 1773, stationed ten preachers, and reported 1160 "numbers in Society." Year by year Asbury, along with the ever-increasing number of preachers, rode circuits in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and as far south as North Carolina.

During the Revolutionary War the other British preachers left the country, but Asbury remained. For several months he was forced to go into seclusion in Delaware because his nationality brought him under suspicion. New York was cut off from the Conference. But by 1784 the number of preachers had increased to 83 and the "numbers in Society" to 14,988.

Organizing a Church

These people were not members of any Church. The preachers were all laymen; not one had been ordained and they were forbidden to give the Holy Communion to their flocks. After the ties with England and the Church of England were broken they were in an anomalous situation with reference to the ordinances, which the people were demanding from the hands of their own

preachers, but which both Wesley and Asbury opposed. The societies in the South broke away from those in the North in the controversy.

It was clear that something had to be done.

It was then that John Wesley made one of the important decisions of ecclesiastical history. The British Church authorities refused to ordain one of his preachers for America, and he took the momentous step of ordaining one with his own hands, though he was not a Bishop.

Wesley did this because his studies of the early Church convinced him, as they had convinced others, that Bishops were not a "third order" of the clergy. There were only two "orders," namely, deacons and elders or presbyters. Episcopacy was an office, and a Bishop was an elder who had been set apart to a certain office or work in the Church.

It followed, therefore, that Wesley, being an ordained elder or presbyter of the Church of England, had a right to set apart persons for this office or work in his own societies, and this he proceeded to do.

In September, 1784, assisted by James Creighton, also an elder, he "set apart" Thomas Coke, LL.D., another presbyter, as "superintendent" for America, and sent him to these shores with instructions to "set apart" or ordain Francis Asbury to the same office.

But Asbury, who knew Americans, refused to accept the ritual and office on Wesley's appointment but insisted upon learning the will of the preachers. They were called together at Baltimore in December, 1784, and at this famous Christmas Conference the Methodist Episcopal Church was formally organized and Francis Asbury was unanimously elected to the office of "superintendent," which soon became Bishop.

On three successive days he was ordained deacon, elder, and Bishop by Dr. Coke, becoming the first Bishop of any Church to be ordained in America.

The New Bishop

Asbury was the Superintendent of societies scattered along the Atlantic seaboard from New England to Charleston, South Carolina, and as far westward as the Holston country of East Tennessee across the Appalachian Mountains.

The *Minutes* showed that John Wesley and Thomas Coke were also superintendents, but Wesley did not visit the new Church and Dr. Coke came only at intervals. Even when Coke was here Asbury attended all the conferences, and since he alone knew the country and the preachers he necessarily discharged nearly the whole responsibility.

Immediately after the adjournment of the Christmas Conference he started on his first episcopal round. It led

him through Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and to Charleston. Then he turned northward and on April 20, 1785, he and Coke convened the first Conference of the new Church at the home of the Rev. Major Green Hill, a local preacher and Revolutionary soldier, whose house still stands near Louisburg, North Carolina.

The operations of the new Church were now in full swing. There were ordained elders and deacons, the sacraments were administered, the people were satisfied since they had the status of members in a recognized Church. Asbury and Coke, accompanied by the Rev. Major Thomas Morrell, another Revolutionary soldier among the preachers, and John Dickins, who became the first Publishing Agent, visited President George Washington immediately after his inauguration and presented him a congratulatory address on behalf of the Church.

In the meantime the Circuit Riders followed the pioneers as they streamed westward along the Wilderness Road and the other early routes. It was said that the first sound in the wilderness was the ring of the settler's axe as he cleared a space for his cabin, and the second was the "hello" of the Circuit Rider at the settler's door.

The Church spread ever westward as they rode. When Asbury died in 1816 it had reached the Father of Waters.

The Great Circuit Rider

Asbury was "The Prophet of the Long Road." From 1784 until 1800 he was alone in the episcopacy and visited each annual conference. Richard Whatcoat was elected in 1800 and travelled with him. Whatcoat died in 1806, and William McKendree was elected two years later, and the practice continued.

Year by year until his death in 1816 Asbury rode his circuit from New England to Charleston and over the mountains. As long as he was able to do so he rode a horse, and in later years he used a chaise. In spite of almost superhuman sufferings at times, he rode on, though on his last journey he could not stand and had to be carried bodily from the chaise to his preaching places.

In forty-five years Francis Asbury travelled 275,000 miles over the pioneer trails of the continent. He preached more than 16,000 times, an average of a sermon a day. More than sixty times he crossed the uncharted Appalachians.

When he came there were only ten preachers of his faith in the land; when he died there were 700, and he had ordained 6,000 with his own hands. Under his supervision the members increased from under twelve

hundred to nearly a quarter of a million, a ratio of growth greater by far than that of the population.

Asbury never had a home. He did not even have a rented room. He lived literally on the road and slept wherever night overtook him. His only address was "America," and letters so addressed always reached him.

On his last journey in 1816 he was unable to reach the Conference at Charleston, although he was within thirty miles of the city when he was forced to stop. He turned back northward and went a few miles a day when he could travel at all, intent on reaching the General Conference at Baltimore. But he could not go on. His travelling companion, the Rev. John Wesley Bond, carried him into the cabin of George Arnold in Spottsylvania County, Virginia, where he died on March 31, 1816.

He was buried at Arnold's house, but a month later his body was taken to the General Conference and buried under the pulpit of the Eutaw Street Church in Baltimore. Forty years later it was moved again, and now rests in Mount Olivet Cemetery with many other notable men of his Church.

Asbury's Place in History

Asbury was the virtual creator of a great Church. His genius shaped its policy and his iron control guided it during the perilous formative days. He made it, by his insistence on itinerancy, into one of the most effectively functioning bodies in the world. Whatever it has meant to America is due in no small degree to the organizing and administrative genius of Francis Asbury.

As the bearer of a moral culture to the rude frontier settlements, he probably has no peer in our history. He and his Circuit Riders went into every new community and into nearly every log cabin in the wilderness. In their saddle bags they carried the Bible, the hymnal, books, and religious literature of every kind. They brought the news of the outside world. They fought intemperance and every form of wrong doing, and they made law-respecting citizens out of people who might have been ruffians.

Asbury was the educational pioneer of his day. He has long been credited with establishing the first Sunday school in America. His preachers, who had little formal education, were required to preach annually on education. Furthermore, they dotted their wide circuits with schools. As early as 1780 a plan was drawn and money was raised for a school in North Carolina, though it was not actually opened for several years. In Virginia, Georgia, Kentucky, and both the Carolinas they established schools, and they opened a degree-conferring college in Maryland.

Their successors established hundreds of schools and colleges in practically every state. Many of these were suspended as the progress of public education rendered them unnecessary, but more than 150 are in operation today, and some of them are among the greatest in the land.

In 1789 Asbury was instrumental in starting a Publishing House, which is now the largest of its kind in America or in the world. In the same year he started *The Arminian Magazine*, a monthly periodical which, under different names and with some lapses, has continued until this day. Books and periodicals poured from the presses in a stream which has been increasing in volume for more than 150 years and is now greater than it has ever been. Asbury may almost be said to deserve the title of American Publisher Number One.

It is small wonder that President Calvin Coolidge, in dedicating the Asbury monument, exclaimed, "Who shall say where his influence, written upon the immortal souls of men, shall end!"



REFERENCES

The following books are recommended for reading in connection with the Asbury Trail Award. One of them should be found in your public library, or they can be read in the Historical Library at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. They cannot be borrowed from the library but may be used in the reading room.

1. Asbury: The Journal of Francis Asbury, 3 volumes
2. Tipple: The Prophet of the Long Road
3. Tipple: The Heart of Asbury's Journal
4. Strickland: The Pioneer Bishop—Life and Times of Francis Asbury
5. Smith: Life of Francis Asbury
6. Briggs: Bishop Asbury, a Biographical Study
7. Du Bose: Francis Asbury, a Biographical Study
8. Duren: Francis Asbury
9. Mains: Francis Asbury

